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ABSTRACT

Immigration legislation in the United States is aimed primarily at Mexican migrants, who account for over half of all undocumented immigrants in the United States. Citizens of Central American and Caribbean countries contribute another 20%. The first section of this booklet traces the development of United States immigration legislation from the late 1800s to the present and examines its impact on immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean. Section two examines the peculiar symbiotic relationship between Mexican labor and American business that developed in the American Southwest during the 34-year rule of Mexican President Porfirio Diaz (1876-1910). The bracero program is also discussed at some length. Section three presents four interviews with undocumented immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. The interviews include information about why the immigrants left their home countries, how they entered the United States, what type of work they do, what major problems they face as undocumented immigrants, how long they plan to stay in the United States, and under what conditions they would return home. The epilogue looks at statistical analyses of the 1980 Census by demographers at the Bureau of the Census. (JHZ)

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Immigration to the United States from Latin America: Past and Present

U.S. Immigration Law and its Application in the Western Hemisphere

The Special Case of Mexico

Interviews with Undocumented Immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala

Epilogue: The Real Numbers on Undocumented Immigration

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FOREWORD

The League of United Latin American Citizens has been a concerned observer and active participant in the continuing debate over immigration reform since the first bills were introduced in Congress six years ago. Much of the debate, however, is marred by half-truths, inaccuracies and a lack of basic historical knowledge.

This booklet, "Immigration to the United States from Latin America: Past and Present," seeks to resolve a number of disputed issues in the debate:

1) What are the recent patterns of immigration from neighboring countries to the United States? How has immigration from countries of the Western Hemisphere been regulated by U.S. law in the past?

2) What is the history -- and the legacy -- of the migration of Mexican labor to jobs in industry and agriculture in the United States?

3) Why do undocumented immigrants from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean leave their homes and families to risk a hazardous and arduous journey to come to the United States?

4) What is the real rate of undocumented immigration to the United States as calculated by statistical and demographic experts in the Bureau of the Census?

This booklet, the fourth in a series on Latin American topics produced by LULAC's Latin American Project, seeks to provide citizens and lawmakers the historical background and awareness of contemporary issues regarding hemispheric migration that is needed to make an informed and knowledgeable decision on immigration matters. We recommend it to all readers interested in U.S. immigration law, historic patterns of hemispheric migration, and relations between the United States and the neighboring countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Eduardo Peña, Jr.
Chairman
The LULAC Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

Immigration reform always has a target. By the early years of the twentieth century, Asians were effectively barred from this country by exclusionist legislation and by bilateral agreement with Japan. In the 1920s, large-scale immigration from southern and eastern Europe was curtailed by legislation that allowed only a small percentage of citizens from those regions to enter the United States. The Simpson-Rodino immigration legislation that is currently awaiting resolution in the U.S. Congress aims to stop illegal immigration to the United States, the vast majority of which occurs along the nearly 2,000-mile border that separates the United States and Mexico. The migrants targeted by this legislation, then, are primarily Mexicans, who account for over half of all undocumented immigrants in the U.S.; citizens of Central American and Caribbean countries contribute another twenty percent.

The first section of this booklet, "U.S. Immigration Law and Its Application in the Western Hemisphere," traces the development of U.S. immigration legislation from the late nineteenth century to the present and examines its impact on immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean. With the exception of Mexico, immigration from the hemisphere was low through the first half of the twentieth century, has generally increased since the 1950s and is strongest from countries in close proximity to the United States. Surprisingly, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean -- the very countries whose migrants are now targeted by current immigration reform -- were exempt until 1965 from the numerical quotas imposed on immigrants from all countries outside the hemisphere. The rate of immigration to the United States from these neighboring countries appears to respond not to new legal restrictions placed by American authorities, but to the ebb and flow of political and economic stability in each country.

The second section, "The Special Case of Mexico," examines the peculiar symbiotic relationship between Mexican labor and American business that developed in the American Southwest during the rule of Mexican President Porfirio Diaz (1876-1910). Responding to the push and pull of internal politics, the United States alternately encouraged or suppressed the migratory flow in the first four decades of this century, thus reflecting the same ambivalence to the migration of Mexican labor that exists in our country today. A large portion of this section examines the structure and legacy of the "bracero program," an unprecedented bilateral agreement first signed during World War II that recruited temporary migrant laborers from Mexico to work in U.S. agriculture. The bracero program continued long past the conclusion of the war, finally ending in 1964. The section also analyzes the reasons why

domestic political forces in the United States are split on the value of Mexican labor in our economy and why agreement on how migration between the U.S. and Mexico should be controlled is so difficult.

The third section, "Interviews with Undocumented Immigrants," begins with a statistical outline of America's undocumented immigrant population as derived from the 1980 Census. The heart of the section, however, is the four interviews conducted with undocumented immigrants from countries in Latin America that have contributed large numbers of citizens to the migratory flow: Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Their answers to questions and the stories they tell are central to an understanding of the motivations behind the migration from neighboring countries to the United States and to the problems they face as illegal residents here. Among the questions are:

Why did you leave your country?

How did you enter the U.S.?

What type of work do you do here?

What major problems do you face as an undocumented immigrant?

How long do you plan to stay here?

Under what conditions would you return home?

The epilogue, "The Real Numbers on Undocumented Immigration," looks at the findings of recent statistical analyses of the 1980 Census by demographers at the government's Bureau of the Census. These studies put the level of undocumented immigrants in the country, and their annual rate of increase, at numbers less than those commonly accepted in the public debate over illegal immigration. The oddity of these scientific studies is that the reports of one arm of the federal government -- the Bureau of the Census -- appear to have had little effect in reorienting or modifying the debate among many Members of Congress, who continue to use speculative and exaggerated estimates of the undocumented population when discussing the various aspects of the immigration reform legislation.

I. U.S. Immigration Law and Its Application in the Western Hemisphere

The first legislation to reverse the tradition of free and open immigration to the United States from any country in the world was the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The Exclusion Act put an end to a sizable immigration to the West Coast of the United States by Chinese laborers and prohibited the naturalization of members of the Chinese population then resident in the United States. Advocates for the bill included unemployed non-Chinese laborers, early union organizers who objected to the influx of cheap Chinese labor, and "nativists" fearful of race-mixing and the detrimental impact they claimed such integration would have on the nation. This same coalition, stressing racial homogeneity as an essential element of national unity, was influential in legislative attempts to impose literacy restrictions on immigration near the turn of the century, and in the 1907 "Gentlemen's Agreement" between President Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese government that severely limited Japanese immigration to the West Coast.

The first literacy test bill to restrict immigration passed both houses of Congress late in the nineteenth century, but was vetoed by President Grover Cleveland on the grounds that it departed from American tradition. A similar bill, requiring literacy in some language for immigrants over the age of 16, became law over the veto of President Woodrow Wilson in 1917. Like the immigration legislation that followed in the 1920's, the literacy bill aimed to restrict immigration from Southern and Eastern European countries and to favor immigration from England, Germany, Ireland and Scandinavia.

Ironically, 1917 was also the year that the Jones Act extended U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans. The literacy test bill acted to limit immigration from areas outside northern Europe, while the Jones Act gave citizenship to a Caribbean population with Hispanic and African ethnic and cultural roots. 1917 also marked the beginning of direct American participation in the First World War; American military strategists considered Puerto Rico to be, in the words of historian Arturo Morales Carrion "the Gibraltar of the Caribbean, a crucial defensive bulwark for U.S. security."

In 1921, limits on the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States during a single year were imposed for the first time in the country's history. The 1921 legislation limited immigration to three percent of the number of each European nationality present in the U.S. population in 1910, and limited yearly immigration from Europe to 350,000. This numerical ceiling represented a sharp curtailment of previous migration patterns: at its peak in the first decade of the twentieth century, immigration averaged about 800,000 per year, mostly from Italy, Russia, Austria and Hungary.

The National Origins Quota Law of 1924 restricted the immigration of southern and eastern Europeans even further, reducing the annual quota of legal immigrants from 355,000 to 150,000 per year. Immigration from Asia was banned.

Citizens of countries in the Western Hemisphere were exempt from quota restrictions and could legally enter the United States after obtaining a visa from U.S. officials. Visa applicants from the hemisphere still had to pass restrictions on immigration concerning literacy, health, morals and economic standing. Two reasons were cited for exempting neighboring countries in the hemisphere from quota restrictions. The first and most important reason was that growers and industrialists in the Southwest had already become dependent on cheap, abundant Mexican labor; they argued that Mexican workers were an essential factor in the economic growth and expansion of the American Southwest. The second reason was the fear of the Department of State that any restriction of immigration would strain relations with our neighbors at a time when the United States was trying to foment a spirit of cooperation (called "Pan-Americanism") among the nations of the New World.

Even without the quota restrictions or outright ban on immigration that was imposed on other areas of the world, immigration from Latin America (excluding the unique case of Mexico, which will be discussed in the next section) remained low. In fact, a House report in 1930 on a bill designed to place a quota on immigration from countries in the Western Hemisphere -- its real intention was to curtail immigration from Mexico -- admitted that Central and South America and the West Indies were not sources of immigration to the United States. Latin America and Caribbean migration to the United States (again, excluding Mexico) remained at relatively low levels throughout the 1930's, 40's and 50's.

Following World War II, the United States assumed a new prominence in international affairs. As the leader of the "free world" in the Cold War against the Soviet Union, the Administration of President Harry S. Truman sponsored legislation that allowed citizens from Eastern European countries under communist control to emigrate to the United States. These "displaced persons" entered the United States in numbers far in excess of their quota limitations imposed by the 1924 legislation.

Truman's challenge to Congressional authority on immigration matters and the influx of Eastern European refugees led to the enactment of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. The McCarran-Walter Act reaffirmed the basic features of the 1924 legislation. It maintained a worldwide limit on immigration at 154,000 per year; immigration quotas from particular countries retained the restrictions and biases of the 1924 Act. Immigration from Asian countries was now legal, but only at very restrictive quotas. Great Britain,

Germany and Ireland kept nearly two-thirds of the yearly quota for the entire world. Immigration from the Western Hemisphere remained exempt from the quota system, but applicants for visas still had to clear a long list of barriers devised to exclude homosexuals, polygamists, anarchists and communists, among others.

The purpose of the legislation, says historian Philip C. Dolce, author of "The McCarran-Walter Act and the Conflict over Immigration Policy During the Truman Administration," was

> to preserve the ethnic composition of the nation by selecting immigrants whose traditions, language, and culture were thought to be nearly the same as that existing in the United States . . . Proponents of this legislation believed that domestic tranquility demanded a largely homogeneous population. They believed that northern Europeans could best assimilate into American society and also maintain the nation's tradition and culture."

The McCarran-Walter Act was passed during a period when domestic concerns over communist influence in the United States reached hysterical dimensions. The discriminatory and punitive nature of the 1952 legislation, says Dolce, combined "the traditional motivations of immigration restriction, which was to preserve the racial and cultural heritage of the nation, with the Cold War fear of subversive foreigners."

Legal immigration from Latin America to the United States increased markedly during the thirteen-year duration of the McCarran-Walter Act. Immigration from Mexico as a percentage of the worldwide amount doubled during the decade of the 1950's, from 5.9% in the forties to 11.9% in the fifties. During the 1960's Mexico's percentage of worldwide immigration to the U.S. increased to 13.3%, while Cuba in this same period contributed 7.7% of total immigrants. The percentage of worldwide immigration to the United States furnished by Latin American countries increased to 39% in the 1960's. In total numbers, immigration remained far below the annual levels reached in the early twentieth century, averaging 250,000 per year in the 1950's and 330,000 per year the following decade.

The impetus to the surge in immigration from Cuba was the 1959 Revolution led by Fidel Castro. Dissatisfaction with Castro's communist government induced an estimated 800,000 Cubans -- approximately ten percent of the entire population -- to leave the island between 1959 and 1980. The vast majority of these Cubans now live in the United States.

In 1965 a major revision of immigration legislation occurred. The national origin quota system was abolished; in its place was constructed a complex

seven-category preference system for granting visas to those applying for immigration to the United States. The McCarran-Walter Act had given preference to immigrants with special skills, their families and their parents. The 1965 Amendments to the Act gave preference to family reunification: adult unmarried children of U.S. citizens and unmarried children and spouses of resident aliens received primary consideration in awarding the limited number of visas. The settlement in the United States of children under 18 and spouses of U.S. citizens remains the government's top priority: they are not bound by, and are not included in, either worldwide limits or per country limits in applying for permission to enter the United States.

The 1965 Amendments maintained limits on immigration from countries outside the Western Hemisphere: the new ceiling was set at 170,000. With the removal of national quotas, candidates for immigration were considered on a first-come, first-serve basis from all the nations of the world, in accordance with the preference system. Although the 1965 legislation limited a single country to no more than 20,000 immigrants per year, race or national origin was no longer a consideration.

A major change brought by the 1965 Act was the quota ceiling of 120,000 immigrants per year from the Western Hemisphere. This marked the first time in U.S. history that any numerical restriction was placed on immigration from neighboring countries in the hemisphere. Additional amendments in 1978 revoked the ceilings on immigration set for each hemisphere and established a worldwide competition for the 290,000 visas granted each year. All the world's nations are now subject to the same seven-category preference system and to the 20,000 per year limit.

The 1965 legislation that amended the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 caused dramatic shifts in countries sending immigrants to the United States. No longer did immigrants from Western Europe dominate; now the brunt of immigration comes from Asia and Latin America. In the first full year after the 1965 legislation took effect, 21% of the immigrants were Asian, with the majority arriving from Korea, Taiwan and the Phillipines. By the late 1970's, European countries, formerly favored by law, contributed only 13% of all legal immigrants.

In the decade of the 1970's, legal immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean remained near the level of the previous decade, at about 40% of the total. The overwhelming majority of these immigrants are from countries in close proximity to the United States: Mexico, the Central American countries and the island nations of the Caribbean.

The recent Congressional concern over immigration reform, however, has not been in response to changes in the pattern of legal immigration, but in

response to a series of events that caused a perception by many Americans that government regulation of immigration to the United States was out of control.

The flight of the "boat people" from Indochina in the 1970s created an enormous refugee settlement problem for the United States and rekindled the anguish of our involvement in the war in Vietnam.

In a six-month period in 1980, some 125,000 Cubans arrived in Florida in an uncontrolled sea migration. Thousands of Cubans converged on Havana's Mariel harbor upon hearing that the Cuban government would allow boats to sail from there to the United States. The Cubans arrived to the United States in numbers that overwhelmed the capacity of state and federal authorities to process and resettle them. During the exodus, the Castro government expelled a small number of criminals and patients with severe mental problems and inserted them into the crowd at Mariel. Lurid publicity about this criminal element among the refugees and the problems associated with them alarmed the American public.

Around the same time, some 10,000 Haitians fled the poverty and repression of the now-deposed government of "President-for-Life" Jean-Claude Duvalier and set out for the United States in small, overcrowded boats. Some boats sank before reaching land; dramatic drownings on Florida's Atlantic Coast emphasized the Haitians' desperation. Attempts to resettle Haitians in the United States were more difficult than for Cubans, owing to their comparative lack of family ties here. Many Haitians languished in prison camps for years after their arrival. The Carter Administration in 1980 gave the Cubans and Haitians a special "entrants" status that allowed those who had already arrived to remain legally in the United States.

The rise in politically motivated violence in El Salvador and Guatemala beginning in the late 1970s spurred an increase in undocumented immigration from these countries to the United States. Continuing violence following the 1979 Sandinista revolution has caused increasing legal and illegal immigration to the United States from Nicaragua. Hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua are currently living in the United States.

Illegal immigrants fleeing the political turmoil in Central America have become more noticeable in recent years as public concern grows over U.S. foreign policy in the isthmus. The immigrants have found allies in the United States who seek to protect them from government attempts to deport them. The "Sanctuary movement" is a religious-based network that shelters undocumented immigrants from the region on the grounds that deportation to their countries could cause them physical harm, imprisonment, or death. The Department of State disputes these assertions and, in many cases, denies the

veracity of the evidence put forward by advocates for the Central Americans as confirmation of these claims. Congressional efforts to grant Salvadorans permission to remain in the United States until the civil war there ends have not been successful.

A 1980 revision of U.S. refugee policy has not benefitted Central Americans who came to the U.S. after fleeing the violence and repression of their home country. During the 1940s, 50s and 60s, hundreds of thousands of citizens from Eastern European countries and from Cuba were admitted to the United States under previous laws that defined refugees as persons fleeing persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution from any communist or communist-dominated country or area. The Refugee Act of 1980 removed the ideological definition of a refugee as one who flees from a communist regime. Still, the U.S. government does not accept the contention that Salvadorans and Guatemalans left their homeland (according to the 1980 definition) "because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion," saying instead that they came here mainly to find work. The government has also refused to grant them "extended voluntary departure" (EVD), a status awarded by the Attorney General that allows nationals of strife-torn countries the right to remain in the U.S. until conditions in their homelands improve. EVD status has been granted in recent years to Lebanese, Ugandans, Poles, and Ethiopians. Critics of the government's treatment of the Central Americans say that lingering bias in favor of those fleeing communism remains in determining refugee selection, and that Salvadorans and Guatemalans are denied the refugee or EVD status they deserve because they have fled from countries that are allies, not enemies, of the United States.

Citizens from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Jamaica and other small Caribbean nations have also been entering the United States in increasing numbers: they tend to settle in New York City and the urban industrial areas of the Northeast. With an estimated 300,000 Dominicans, New York City is the second largest Dominican city in the world, following only the capital of Santo Domingo.

The main concern of Americans lawmakers worried about illegal immigration, however, is undocumented immigration from Mexico.

II. The Special Case of Mexico

The first people of European ancestry to settle in what is now the Southwest United States were from Spain. Moving northward from the colonial capital of New Spain at Mexico City, the Spanish gradually founded a series of isolated, sparsely-populated settlements in an immense territory stretching from Texas to California. Santa Fe, in current-day New Mexico, was founded in 1610; Albuquerque in 1706. The settlements in Texas date from the same period: El Paso was founded in 1659, San Antonio in 1718. California settlements, enormous distances from the capital, were founded last: Monterrey in 1769 and Los Angeles in 1781. These "mission" settlements, with administrative, religious and military functions, remained part of the colonial Spanish empire until Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821. Control of these and many other settlements then passed to the Mexican government.

Tension between Mexicans and American settlers moving west twice exploded into war in Texas and in what is now the southwest United States. In 1836, American settlers fought and won independence for Texas. Texas became the twenty-eighth state of the union in 1845.

In 1846, war broke out between the United States and Mexico. Although the initial spark of the conflict was aggression alleged by President James K. Polk to have been committed against American citizens by Mexican troops in disputed territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande in what is now south Texas, the war gave ardent American expansionists the excuse they were seeking to seize Mexican lands from Texas to California.

Racked by decades of political factionalism, competing centers of regional control and civil war after the collapse of Spanish authority, the disunited Mexicans were routed by well-armed and disciplined American troops. In the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the government of Mexico was forced to cede all or significant parts of the current-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. Under terms of the treaty, Mexican citizens in the lands conquered by the United States became American citizens if they failed to leave the territory within a year. Only about 2,000 of the 77,000 Mexicans chose to leave.

In the 1853 Gadsden Purchase, Mexico sold land that now lies in southern New Mexico and Arizona to the United States for $10 million. The border of 1853 remains the border that divides the United States and Mexico today.

As Americans in the Southwest increased in population and power, the new border with Mexico came to denote a limit on the expansion of American culture. But the border could not erase the historic ties between the region and

Mexico. For the Mexican citizens of the Southwest who passed to reside in the United States after the events of 1836, 1848 and 1853, for their Mexican-American descendants and for many other residents of the Southwest, the border with Mexico was and is, in the words of historian Theodore S. Beardsley, Jr., "a political division that artificially bisects a single cultural unit."

Migration from Mexico to the United States was little noticed in the lightly populated Southwest of the late nineteenth century. According to Manuel Garcia y Griego, author of "The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964: Antecedents, Operation, and Legacy," the roots of twentieth-century Mexican migration to the United States stem from the thirty-four year rule of Mexican President Porfirio Diaz (1876-1910). Diaz's agricultural policies favored large landowners at the expense of the Mexican peasantry; many peasants lost their land and were forced to look for work elsewhere. His industrialization policies, linked to American mining interests, ushered in an expansion of railroad lines between the United States and Mexico, facilitating transportation between the two countries. With the growth of industry and agriculture in the American Southwest, with Mexican labor readily available, and with transportation links increasing, Mexican workers began to go to the United States to look for work. Entering the United States without paying a head tax imposed in 1882 was illegal, but the law was not enforced along the border.

The passage of the literacy test for immigrants in 1917 over the veto of Woodrow Wilson added another restriction to block the free flow of laborers northward from Mexico. However, the literacy test restrictions were almost immediately rescinded for Mexicans. In 1918, with the joint approval of the Commissioner General of Immigration and the Secretary of Labor, Mexican workers were exempted from the literacy test restrictions, from earlier laws forbidding the admission of contract laborers, and from paying the head tax. According to Gilberto Cardenas, author of "United States Immigration Policy Toward Mexico: An Historical Perspective," the 1918 decision represented the "first successful attempt by growers and other industrialists to gain governmental approval permitting the importation of Mexican labor."

As was stated on page two, the National Origins Law of 1924 placed no quota restrictions on immigrants from the Western Hemisphere. While the State Department feared that the interests of "Pan-Americanism" would be damaged were a quota imposed, agricultural business interests in the Southwest argued that because Mexico was a source of cheap and abundant labor, the exemption of Mexico from the quota restrictions actually favored America's economic development. The power of the agricultural interests was the key to winning the exemption of Mexicans and Latin Americans from the 1924 legislation. According to Thomas Muller, author of The Fourth Wave, a study

of current immigration trends in California, growers and their Congressional supporters had a decisive influence on the legislation. Muller says that "their political strength . . . could have delayed and probably prevented passage of the immigration bills of the 1920s had Mexicans not been exempted."

Other interests, especially organized labor and "nativists" -- those wanting no further alteration of the ethnic, religious and racial stock of the country -- were opposed to the quota exemption for the Western Hemisphere. This opposition did not die with passage of the 1924 legislation. In 1930, Congressman John C. Box introduced legislation to impose harsh immigration quotas on immigrants from the hemisphere. The House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization's 1930 report on the proposed bill made no attempt to hide its racial bias nor its segregationist presumptions.

According to its proponents, most important consequence of the pending bill was "the belief that the white population in the great Southwest will not be under the continued pressure to move farther and farther north into non-Mexicanized areas."

Following the War with Mexico, said the report,

> there was a migration of fine American pioneers (into the newly acquired territory) who took possession of the country, colonizing it and setting up law and order. During the last ten years the racial problem has become acute in the Southwest. Here there have been established, as the demand for cheap labor increased, a great many Mexican immigrants who seem to be driving out the Americans.
>
> How will this system ultimately work out? The Mexican peon, of course, as we know him, is of mixed racial descent -- principally Indian and Spanish, with occasionally a little mixture of black blood. The Mexican comes in freely because there is no quota against him, and during the last few years he has come here in such increasing numbers as almost to reverse the essential consequences of the Mexican War. The recent Mexican immigrants are making a reconquest of the Southwest.

The bill never became law.

The opposition to the quota exemption for Mexico and the rest of the Western Hemisphere expressed in the 1930 Congressional report was, as indicated above, also evident in 1924. In return for the hemispheric exemption in the National Origins Law, the Administration of Calvin Coolidge pledged to enforce existing immigration laws more stringently along the border. To this end, the Border Patrol was created later that year.

According to Jorge Bustamante, a Mexican expert on border issues and migration, the creation of the Border Patrol changed the status of the Mexican worker in the United States from a migrant worker basically immune to deportation to that of "a fugitive from the law who had to constantly hide in order not to be apprehended and expelled from the country." Prior to the creation of the Border Patrol, says Bustamante, the Mexican worker in the United States needed only to stay out of trouble with the local police "in order to consider himself completely safe on U.S. roads and fairly free to choose the most convenient work. Only a judge could decree his deportation." The activities of the Border Patrol tripled the number of deportation in its first five years: from 1920-1924, 5,096 Mexicans were deported; from 1925-1929, 15,434 were deported.

The onset of the Great Depression and the resultant leap in unemployment after 1929 increased the voices demanding the deportation of Mexicans. Legislation in 1929 made illegal entry into the United States a felony.

The cries for action to stop the migration culminated in "Operation Deportation." According to Bustamante, the general procedure followed by the Border Patrol and other enforcement officials was to require all those suspected of not being a citizen to provide documentation of citizenship.

> The person who could not satisfy this requirement was expelled from the country . . . Many Mexicans who had in fact left Mexico as immigrants as long as twenty years before . . . suddenly found themselves expelled from the United States.

The effort to repatriate Mexicans in the United States was effective: Garcia y Griego cites Mexican govenment statistics that state that 345,000 Mexicans left the United States and returned to their homeland between 1929 and 1932. The number of Mexicans legally entering the U.S. during the 1930's dropped sharply, and the Mexican-born population in the United States diminished steadily throughout the Depression. This decline in both legal and illegal immigration of Mexicans to the United States in the 1930's provides a sharp contrast to the migratory stimulus of the 1942 "Bracero Program."

The Bracero Period

On August 4, 1942, the governments of the United States and Mexico signed an unprecedented agreement to establish a program to recruit temporary migrant laborers from Mexico to work in the U.S. As summarized by Garcia y Griego, the agreement contained the following points:

1) U.S. employers needed to supply written contracts for permission to recruit braceros.
2) Recruitment was based on need; Mexican workers were not to displace

domestic labor nor lower their wages;

3) Employers paid for transportation and subsistence to and from the recruitment center and the work site;
4) Migrants were not encouraged to remain permanently; and
5) Racial segregation and discrimination based on nationality was prohibited.

The administration of the program and the task of guaranteeing compliance with the agreement was the responsibility of both governments.

The initial phase of the Bracero Program lasted throughout World War II. The demands of sustaining the war effort caused a tremendous economic expansion in the United States; in this early period of the program, braceros were recruited for work in agriculture and the railroads. In contrast to the number of braceros recruited in later years, the number contracted in the 1942-1946 era was relatively small: Garcia y Griego cites a total of 330,000. A study done in 1980 by the Congressional Research Service put the figure at 220,000.

At the insistence of the Mexican government, braceros were excluded from Texas. The Mexicans knew that their countrymen and American citizens of Mexican descent suffered grave discrimination in Texas and refused U.S. requests to allow braceros to work there. Throughout World War II, then, Texas agriculture relied on undocumented, or illegal, labor.

The extension of the bilateral labor contract after the war revived a program that would continue until 1964. In contrast to the wartime agreement, the seventeen-year post-war period saw a vastly expanded program: 4.2 million braceros were contracted for labor in agriculture between 1947 and 1964.

Mexico had three major concerns regarding the bracero agreement: that the braceros' human rights be respected by the American growers and civil authorities, that they earn a decent wage, and that the flow of workers to the United States be regulated within the terms of the agreement. This last concern about the traffic of undocumented workers to the U.S. was, of course, of great concern to Washington also.

Discrimination against Mexican workers and violations of the labor contracts by employers were cited by Mexican officials as their justification for excluding certain areas in the United States from participation in the bracero program. By the late 1940s, however, the United States was arguing that determination of barred areas should be determined jointly, not unilaterally. Because the bracero agreements had to be renewed periodically, changes in the agreement were subject to continuing negotiations. The unprecedented super-power status enjoyed by the United States after World War II considerably

improved their leverage in the post-war talks. By 1949 Mexican resistance to American pressure collapsed: both countries would determine areas to be excluded from participation in the program. Texas growers were henceforth eligible to contract braceros.

Also thwarted in the same period was the attempt by the Mexican government to determine the wages paid to braceros. Originally, the Mexicans contended that the "prevailing wage" to be paid to the bracero was an issue that should be decided in negotiations between the two governments, not by individual employers in the United States. In 1951, however, the Mexican government conceded exclusive responsibility for the determination of wages to the U.S. Secretary of Labor.

The influx of undocumented (or, in the bracero period, uncontracted) Mexican labor to the United States was a vexing problem for both countries. In the 1940s, the Mexican government saw the illegal migration of its workers as a threat to the stability of the bracero program and worried that Mexican agriculture would suffer labor shortages as thousands of campesinos spurned domestic employment in agriculture and left on their own for better pay in American fields. The government was also concerned that illegal workers would not benefit from the legal protections written into the agreement. As the program continued into the 1950s, the Mexicans realized that not only was illegal migration to the United States an unintended corollary of the bracero agreement, but that they were virtually powerless to halt the exodus.

Meanwhile, in the United States, illegal immigration from Mexico became an issue of national concern in the post-war years. Many growers and their allies in Congress were willing to ignore this illegal flow of Mexicans to the U.S.: hiring illegals rather than braceros saved growers the transportation expenses they incurred in the program, saved them money by paying lower wages to illegals, and spared them the time and expense of dealing with the program's bureaucracy.

However, public pressure, stimulated by news of a rise in INS apprehensions at the border and by a 1951 Presidential Report on Migratory Labor, gradually pushed the authorities to action. Such action took two forms.

The first strategy was that of legalizing the undocumented Mexicans already in the United States. Beginning in 1947, deportable Mexicans were given bracero contracts in the United States, thus legalizing their status here. Formerly, Mexicans here illegally were returned to Mexico to undergo that government's screening process to determine an individual's eligibility in the program. According to Garcia y Griego, during fiscal year 1950 only 19,813 new braceros were admitted from Mexico as contract laborers, while 96,239 deportable Mexcians already in the United States were legalized and put under

contract.

The second strategy was an aggressive policy of deporting undocumented Mexican workers. This policy reached its zenith in 1954 with "Operation Wetback."

Organized in the summer of 1954 by General Joseph May Swing, Commissioner of the INS, Operation Wetback utilized civilian and military authorities to apprehend and deport Mexicans illegally in the U.S. From California to Texas, General Swing's forces deported more than a million people to Mexico. The constitutional rights of Mexican Americans prohibiting unreasonable search and seizure and assuring due process and equal protection of the law were cruelly violated during the operation. Unable to provide the documentation that was demanded by the INS, many U.S. citizens of Mexican descent were illegally included in the mass deportation.

In its final years, the bracero program met strong opposition in the U.S. Congress, due to increased awareness that serious violations of the rights of the braceros were widespread, to the growing realization among lawmakers that the program was stimulating, not impeding illegal immigration, and to the expanding political influence of organized labor, a consistent opponent of the contract labor program. In 1962 the Kennedy Administration openly opposed renewing the bilateral agreement and on the last day of 1964, the bracero program ended.

With the termination of the bracero program, the ongoing migration of Mexicans to the United States looking for work once again became illegal. Although the bracero program differed from earlier and more recent migration by Mexicans in the sense that a formal structure was created to try to control the influx, it reinforced the previous tendency to concentrate Mexican workers in agriculture and furnished a momentum to the current migratory flow. In this respect, says Garcia y Griego, "the migration of braceros constitutes a link which establishes continuity between the first wave of Mexican migrants during the first three decades of this century and the more recent immigration of undocumented persons during the 1960s and 1970s."

In recent years, Mexican labor in the United States has expanded into various sectors of employment. According to Alejandro Portes and Robert L. Bach, authors of Latin Journey, both legal and illegal Mexican immigration has turned toward urban areas, especially in light industry and service-related jobs in restaurants and hotels. Portes and Bach say that legal immigrants and illegals with long-term experience in the U.S. tend to move into the more lucrative urban jobs, while undocumented newcomers stay in agriculture.

Domestic Politics and Immigration from Mexico

In the United States there is now and has long been a distinct dichotomy between groups that place a high value on maintaining access to Mexican labor and other groups that, for a variety of reasons, disdain its value and desire a restriction of the migration.

The former group, consisting mainly of growers, industrialists and business interests concentrated in the West and Southwest, has been dominant at almost every point in the legislative struggle to restrict immigration from Mexico to the United States.

In 1918, the literacy test restriction for immigrants was rescinded for Mexicans, one year after the restriction became law. In 1924, according to author Thomas Muller (see p. 9), the influence of growers would have been great enough to cause Congress to defeat the National Origins Law, had Mexico been included in any quota restrictions. At their behest in 1942, a unique contract labor program was instituted between Mexico and the United States to replace American labor then involved in the war effort. However, the bracero program was rejuvenated in 1947, two years after the end of World War II, and lasted until 1964. Although their influence appeared to falter in 1964, with the end of the contract labor program, and again in 1965, when Mexico and the rest of the Western Hemisphere were, for the first time, subject to an overall ceiling on legal immigration to the United States, these interests favoring access to Mexican labor remain the dominant voice in determining American policy on immigration from Mexico.

In opposition to the growers and their allies is a coalition consisting of labor organizations that claim that undocumented workers drive down wages for American workers, law enforcement officials and the Congressional supporters who decry the massive violation of immigration law at the border and demand tougher punitive measures, and nativists who fear that a sudden influx of foreigners will negatively alter society and government. This coalition has on occasion forced the government to restrict or even deport Mexican labor in the United States, but has never challenged the preeminence of the growers and their allies in determining the course of immigration reform.

The coalition favoring restriction of Mexican labor gains influence when changing economic, social and political conditions in the United States provoke a surge in public support for their ideas. During the deportations of Mexicans in the 1930s, for example, the rise in domestic unemployment resulting from the Great Depression stimulated public backing for measures to expel foreigners competing with American citizens for scarce jobs. During the period of "Operation Wetback" in 1954, Mexican workers were often blamed in press accounts for a variety of crimes and social problems in the Southwest. Two

factors combined to give public sanction to the operation. The first was the undercurrent of anti-foreign sentiment whipped up by the communist hysteria of the McCarthy era. The second was the end of the Korean War in 1953; after the war, American public attention returned to domestic concerns, among them the problems along the border. Although a variety of factors mentioned earlier was responsible for the termination of the bracero program in 1964, it also coincided with a rise in the influence of organized labor in national politics. Labor has been, from its earliest days, in favor of restrictive immigration policies.

The illegal immigration to the United States of Mexican workers is a consequence of historical and cultural factors, of the power of economic interests in the American Southwest that demand continued access to cheap Mexican labor, and of Congressional legislation intended to encourage, not curtail, the migration of Mexican workers. The problem of the "illegal alien" in the United States, says Gilberto Cardenas, is

> one whose seed has been planted time and again by the United States when it has been in need of Mexican labor. When expediency better serves, however, immigration laws have been administered and changed in response to a problem perceived as having been created by illegal aliens, when in fact it is largely of the United States' own making.

III. Interviews with Undocumented Immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatamala

The present debate in Congress over immigration reform began in the last years of Jimmy Carter's presidency and has continued into the second term of Ronald Reagan's.

While most of the debate has focused on the issues of "employer sanctions," "legalization," "farmworker guest programs," and "increased border inspection," little light has been shed on the lives and struggles of the undocumented immigrants in our country or their reasons for coming to the United States.

Examination of the data contained in the 1980 Census by demographers from the Bureau of the Census and the Immigration and Naturalization Service helps sketch an outline of these newest immigrants. Mexicans represent 55% of the two to four million undocumented immigrants in the United States in 1980 (see Epilogue): no other single country contributed a substantial proportion. Other countries from the Western Hemisphere contributed 23% of the undocumented population counted in the Census.

Only five countries -- Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Iran -- had higher proportions of undocumented aliens in the U.S. than legal residents. For Mexico, the demographers estimate that the illegal population residing in the U.S. between 1975-1980 was more than double the number of legally resident immigrants.

The undocumented population is a young one: 18% was under 15 years, 62% was between 15 and 34, and approximately 20% was over 35, with only 6.3% over age 45. This age pattern is standard for all countries of origin: a heavy concentration of the young with very few older members.

Forty-five percent of the undocumented immigrants counted in the 1980 Census arrived during the period 1975-1980. Twenty-eight percent entered between 1970 and 1974, 26% before 1970, and only 1.8% before 1960.

The impact of the undocumented population is geographically uneven. A 1984 count of this population by states estimated that half of the undocumented immigrants counted in the Census, just over one million people, lived in California. The Los Angeles metropolitan area alone accounted for 32% of all undocumented immigrants in the country and 550,000, or 44%, of all undocumented Mexicans. Meanwhile, thirty-three states counted fewer than 10,000 undocumented immigrants in the 1980 Census, and in many states the number was near zero.

The four people we interviewed fit the outline provided by the Census Bureau studies. All four are young, between 28 and 33 years old. The Nicaraguan came to the U.S. three years ago, while the Salvadoran and Guatemalan came six and seven years ago, during a period of rampant political violence in their countries. Only the Mexican woman has been here over a decade and only she intends to stay in the United States. The other three all express the desire to return home when conditions improve. The Mexican and the Guatemalan live in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, a mecca for undocumented immigrants from all over the world. The Nicaraguan and the Salvadoran live in Washington, D.C.; since the late 1970s, increasing numbers of Central Americans have gathered there.

These latest immigrants to our country did not pass through Ellis Island under the gaze of the Statue of Liberty. Instead, they stepped furtively into the United States, passing through holes cut in fences, hiking through mountain passes or wading across the shallow waters of the Rio Grande. The stories they share with us do not differ greatly from those of turn-of-the-century immigrants. The scourges are the same: political oppression and violence, poverty and a lack of opportunities. The hope is the same, too: that a better life may be found in this country. What differs from previous eras is the welcome we Americans give them.

Following these personal testimonies is a brief epilogue that describes the laborious -- and often unnoticed -- efforts of Census Bureau experts to determine an accurate count of the undocumented immigrants in the country and their annual population increase.

Here, then, are the stories of the undocumented.

Mexico

The first interview was conducted with a thirty-three year old Mexican woman who lives in the Los Angeles area with her husband and two children. She came to the United States seventeen years ago from a small village in the state of Jalisco. Her education in Mexico ended after the third grade.

Why did you leave Mexico?

My father worked a long time here in the U.S. He came here during the time of the braceros. He used to tell us children that it was beautiful here. The kids like the idea of coming to the U.S., and I liked the idea best of all. I wanted to be the one to come here, to live here, to be able to tell the family how it was here. I was 16 or 17 when I left.

Were you working back in Mexico when you left?

I used to help my father in the fields, raising corn and sugar cane. I know about planting, hoeing and clearing the fields. I know everything from planting cane to cutting it. I know every step of the process.

How did you cross the border?

I came over on a tourist visa. I came to Tijuana by bus, and from Tijuana to Burbank I got a ride in a truck. The truck brought me to my relatives' house in Burbank. My relatives left Burbank soon after I arrived to go to another city in California where problems with immigration were worse. I was afraid to go because a few days before they left some guy came back from that other city beat up and shot by the police. He didn't want to go to the hospital because they would know he was illegal. I was taking care of him; I put pieces of cloth soaked in salt water on his wounds. The swelling went down and he eventually returned to Mexico. I decided to stay here with friends to start my life in L.A., cleaning houses and washing cars. I liked it and I decided to stay.

So you didn't have to jump the fence or cross the river?

(Laughter) No. Only once when my father got very ill, I had to leave to be with him in our village in Mexico. When I came back, they didn't want to give me another tourist visa. Of course, I had to return because I had my children and my husband here. When I was returning to the United States, immigration grabbed us and took us to prison for three days. I was deported to Tijuana that time, but I got back in soon afterwards.

When you first entered the U.S., why did you end up here in Los Angeles?

Well, the first time it sounded so nice, my father was here a long time and he said Los Angeles was the nicest, most beautiful place you can imagine. He said there was a lot of work and a lot of opportunity and that a person who walked straight would have a lot of benefits and opportunities for work.

What type of work do you do?

I sew. I like to sew. After we first got married, my husband kept having problems with immigration wherever he worked. Whenever they raided a place he was working, he'd lose his job. What was I going to do without a job and with two kids? Then I went out and bought pieces of cloth for four or five dollars, made blouses from them and sold them on the street. I would go out with my two kids in my arms and with my bag of blouses that I made by hand. And then out of that money I used to buy food and more material to make more blouses. I continued to do that until I finally found a job in a clothing factory and then, well, it was a lot easier.

And now what kind of job do you do?

Now I don't work in the factory any more. I buy clothes on sale at stores where the clothes are cheaper. I buy them, add a few details, add a few cents more to the price, sell them, and that's how I take care of my kids. I'm a volunteer in schools; any kind of movement or program they need help on, I'm there. At the same time, I do my little business. I sell clothes to the people who need them and when I see that some people don't have money to pay me, I let them go until they do have the money. When I see that they have no money and have just come from Mexico, El Salvador or Guatemala and they really need the clothes, I give it to them for free, as a gift. But when I give it to them free, I tell them that today you needed help, but in the future when you get on your feet and see someone else who needs help, then you help them.

Now you're doing okay with this type of job?

Yes, I'm doing okay, thank God.

What impression of the U.S. did you have before you came?

I imagined that this was a free country like my father told me. That there was no problem coming and going between Tijuana and California. Since he was part of the bracero program and was a contracted worker, he was able to do so easily in that period. But when my visa expired they wouldn't renew it again here in L.A. No, my impression of the United States is very different from the idea I had of this country before I came here. My father told us that they used to treat him well and watch out for him, give him food and all. But the boss in my factory said that if you don't get here at seven in the morning and punch in at eight I'm going to call immigration and they'll take you back to Mexico. So we had to work an extra hour without getting paid. And that's how it was for three years, until we met some Chicanos organizing the undocumented; they explained to us our rights and that we couldn't be pushed around because all the dressmakers -- documented or undocumented -- have rights. That's when I started recognizing the rights we dressmakers have.

So then the reality of the U.S. did not conform with your earlier impression? Why do you think it's like that, that it's

different from what people had described?

I think that depends a lot on the government, of both governments, of the government of Mexico and the government here in the United States. Because when a person is poor a person is alone. And the big fish always eat the little fish.

In other words, being poor is a sin in both countries?

That's right, except that here you not only have to work to survive, you also have to hide.

So that immigration won't take you?

Yes, because if they see you, they look at you and if you look latino, even if you don't do anything wrong, they still question you. If something happens and there is a latino and an american together, immigration will stop the latino, even if the latino wasn't to blame. And that is what is called discrimination.

Do you plan to return permanently some day to Mexico? Have you thought about it?

Yes, I have thought about it, because I carry the memories of my country in my heart. I would like to stay here, I would like very much to stay here, but what I would like most is to have my papers in proper order, to be able to come and go between Mexico and the U.S.

To be able to live in both countries?

Yes, to be able to live in both countries, so that my kids can live in both places, learning the necessities of Mexico and their obligations as Americans, since they're U.S. citizens.

So then your intention is to stay in the U.S.?

Yes, that's my intention.

If you decided to go back to Mexico, under what conditions would your return?

Well, . . . I'd like to have a house, a little land to work, a business to work in, to live on. Because if you don't have something to live on, the salary that workers get in Mexico isn't enough to buy food for one person for one day, much less a family of four.

Would you like to become a U.S. citizen?

Well, yes, of course.

The way you're living now, are you afraid you'll be deported?

At this point, no, not any more. To tell you the truth I would be afraid if they arrested me and my kids stayed in the streets or in school alone and abandoned. But I would fight for my rights, because there are some rights that protect the undocumented.

So then you're not afraid of getting arrested and being deported, because you know your rights and can defend yourself?

Yes. Yes.

What are your major problems here?

My major problems are those (immigration) laws that are now being proposed (in Congress) . . . I don't like it, I don't like it at all. I wish they would give us our rights, our papers, so that we can travel, go to our country, see our families, come and go and work. That's what I would like, so that one can feel free and happy in both countries.

What future do you want for your children?

What I would like the most is that my kids have something in the future to live on, to live well, and to have a better future so that they can see our situation -- we didn't get an education . . . to be a good example so that in the future they can help those who can't defend themselves.

What do you miss most from your country?

My family, my mother, my father, my grandparents, my brothers and sister. To feel the freedom there. There you go to your land, you stand on your land, you raise your arms and say "Thank God!" There I can run wherever I want, but here I can't go wherever I want. If I go to my left, the police may be there, and if I run to my right, immigration might be there. You have to walk a fine line here, hiding from people.

El Salvador

The Salvadoran interviewed below is a twenty-eight old male who left his small village in the province of La Union six years ago to come to the United States. He is now a legal resident of this country, married to an American citizen.

Why did you leave El Salvador?

Mostly for political reasons, but not because I was directly involved in politics. I was afraid of being killed. At the time, I was a student in San Salvador. I used to go home to La Union every time I had a vacation. I would go visit my mother. It was a small town where everyone knows everyone else, and, coming from the capital where the political problems were, students were suspected by people who were pro-government of trying to organize the peasants.

What was the situation like in 1980 in El Salvador?

In 1979 I had some relatives who were peasant organizers. One of them was captured by the National Guard. We never saw him again. By 1980 there were strikes and protests in San Salvador and some people from that area in La Union went to a big protest in the capital on January 28 of that year. After that protest the army got a list of all those people who went from La Union. My relatives' names were on the list, the list of people that they were going to kill, and I don't know how, but my name was on there and so was my younger brother's. Neither of us went to the protest.

How did you know that your name was on the list?

Well, when buses go from small towns to the city, the army would be in some part of the town, stopping the bus and asking the passengers, "do you know this person, that one, this one?" When someone said they knew this or that person, the army would capture him, and he wouldn't be seen again.

And someone told you that the army had read your name?

Yes, my name and my brother's.

Was that the specific incident that made you decide to leave?

Not just that. In the end of January, 1980, the army came to the town my grandfather lived in, went to his house and captured one of my uncles. They took him about five blocks away and shot him. After that, believe me, everyone was really scared.

Was your uncle involved in politics?

No, no. He wasn't involved. He didn't even know what was going on. In our family there were two or three people who were involved politically, including one who was a priest.

Why do you think you were on the list?

I don't really know, that's the question I ask myself. I mean, why? Maybe it was because I used to talk about politics, about the situation in San Salvador. People in La Union always used to ask me what was going on, and I'd tell them. They were interested in knowing, and I told them. But the government had informers all over, and I didn't know this at the time. Other students were on the list, too. So when this uncle of mine was killed, I managed to leave La Union to go to San Salvador. My brother stayed in La Union but he had to leave town to hide in the mountains for a couple of weeks.

Was there a lot of political activity where you were studying?

Yes. In San Salvador most of the high school and college students were organized. Everyday there were protests.

So anyone who was a student in San Salvador at the time was a possible target?

Well, in San Salvador it was different, because it's a big city. In my village any student could be a target. From about 1000 people, maybe 80 families, maybe just ten or fifteen people go the capital to study, so it's pretty easy to see who is studying and who is suspected.

How did you get to the United States?

I found someone -- a "coyote" -- who took us from El Salvador to Mexico. The coyote I had took me all the way to Mexico City.

Was it difficult travelling through Guatemala?

At that time it was not.

Through Mexico?

In Mexico it is difficult because you have to pay a lot of money to either the Mexican police or immigration police.

How much did you end up paying this coyote?

The whole trip was about $2,500.

So these coyotes got you through Mexico. How did you actually enter the country?

Well, we got a visa from the Guatemala border with Mexico and went to Mexico City. If you leave Mexico City you are illegal -- from Mexico City to northern Mexico. So, from Mexico City on, you start paying "mordidas" (bribes) to whomever identifies himself as immigration. When we first got to Tijuana, we had a problem with a Mexican coyote who left us in a hotel and then apparently left to call Mexican immigration. We had left the hotel before immigration came, but when we got back the manager of the hotel told us what had happened and told us we couldn't stay there. I had given all my money to the coyote and now I was broke. I befriended a couple who let me call my

sister in Los Angeles from their house. A coyote the couple introduced me to wanted $300 to take me across the border. So I called my sister, told her I had already paid $1,000, was in Tijuana but needed $300 more to cross the border. She said, "well, you're close," and sent me the money. Crossing the border was really hard, really dangerous.

Was it the most difficult part of the trip?

Yes. That part was really dangerous, because we walked through a pass where bandits assault and rob those who are trying to cross the border. We had to walk a long way to elude the U.S. immigration agents watching us. We left Tijuana about 1 a.m. and didn't get to the pass until about 5 a.m.

Did the coyote cross the border with you?

Yes, he took us into San Diego.

Did you feel safe once you got to San Diego?

I felt safe that I wouldn't be assaulted or robbed, but not safe that I wasn't going to be arrested. I could have been arrested at any time. The coyote told me that the night before the people he took across were in a taxi ready to leave when immigration stopped the cab and arrested the whole group. In San Diego, you can be arrested at any time, any place by immigration or the local police.

Once you got to San Diego, did someone arrange to take you to L.A.?

Yes, the same coyote, it was like a chain.

Why did you decide to come to the U.S. and not go to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras or Mexico?

Well, I had relatives here and I didn't know anybody in the other countries.

So, if you would have had relatives in Costa Rica, you might have gone there?

Yes, I was actually thinking of going to Costa Rica if I knew someone there, but I didn't.

What kind of jobs did you work when you first arrived?

Mostly in restaurants, as a busboy or a dishwasher.

Did you need any documentation to work here?

If you want to work as a dishwasher, you don't need any papers for that.

Did they ask you for a Social Security number?

Yes, they did, but they don't ask to see the card. You just invent a number and write it down. No problem.

Did you know any English when you arrived?

A few words, since a lot of the music in El Salvador is in English, Michael Jackson, that sort of thing. Only about 15 percent of the music is in Spanish. In our schools we were taught English, but the classes were bad because the teacher was not very qualified.

Was it important to you to learn English after you got here? (This was the only one of the four interviews conducted in English.)

Yes it was. I went to various schools to learn. In L.A. and also here in D.C. there are free courses for immigrants who want to improve their English. I try to practice with Americans whenever I can.

What impressions did you have of the U.S. before you came here?

Something like it was a country where you can find everything easily: a job, money, a car.

Do you hope someday to return to El Salvador?

Yes, I want to go back someday, someday to stay.

Under what conditions would you go back?

Well, when everything gets better.

Would you want to become a U.S. citizen?

No.

Before you became a legal resident did you fear sudden arrest or deportation?

Sure, yes, everyday. I didn't want any contact with any authorities because they ask you for documents right away. And if you don't have the papers, you'll be sent to the police, and from there to immigration.

So if something is stolen from your apartment or you get attacked on the street, you don't call the police?

No.

What about a hospital? What do you do if you are in an accident?

Well, a hospital is a problem for two reasons: they ask for too much money and they also ask for identification.

What do you miss from El Salvador?

My mother, my family; if I had a chance, I'd love to be able to visit.

Nicaragua

The following interview was with a thirty year old Nicaraguan male who left his country three years ago with his wife and small son. He is now able to work legally in the United States because he has an application pending for political asylum.

Why did you leave? Were you involved in politics?

No, it wasn't that I was involved with the government or had political problems directly with the government, although I don't agree with the Sandinistas. I felt like I wasn't doing what I had trained for, that I was obligated to live by the government's system. That's why I ended up leaving.

Let me explain. I started studying early in 1979, just before the Sandinistas took over. The following year I continued studying nursing. I finished my schooling and hoped to find an opportunity for a good future. But the situation started to get complicated; the government started to make the changes that they had been planning. In my case, in order to pass from one semester to another, I had to give 200 hours of volunteer work to the government. The two hundred hours of volunteer work for each student was done in the field of his concentration. I was in nursing, so I had to do 200 hours of volunteer work in a hospital or Health Center. After I was sent to a military base near the Honduran border -- about eight hours from my home in Managua -- I decided to leave. I tried to get a visa from the U.S. Embassy in Managua, but that was impossible. My sister-in-law was living in Guatemala so we decided to go to there. We stayed with her in Guatemala for three months. We tried to get a visa at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala through my brother-in-law, who's in the military there, but we were unsuccessful. So then we decided to go first to Mexico and from there enter the U.S. illegally like everyone else. My mother-in-law helped us with the necessary arrangements to cross the border and to travel up here to Washington. She has an application pending for political asylum here; she left Nicaragua when Somoza was deposed because she had worked for the military.

Was it difficult to leave Nicaragua?

At the time we left, to go to any other country in Central America was a lot easier, but now it is difficult to do even that. When we left, it was difficult to go to Costa Rica. The government had to authorize permission, which was very difficult to get, and the applicant had to make a cash deposit. Now, to go to Honduras or El Salvador it is also very difficult.

How did you leave?

We went to Guatemala by plane; in 1983 there were no problems. To get to Mexico City we also went by plane. We stayed there 17 days, during which time a friend we stayed with made connections with the "coyotes" who took us into the U.S. Then we took a bus to Matamoros, across the Rio Grande from

Brownsville (Texas). When we got to Matamoros, another Mexican was waiting for us . . we stayed there two days. Then the coyotes took us across the river to Brownsville and from there we went to San Benito (Texas) for two more days.

When you were crossing the border in the U.S., did you encounter any officials? Were you frightened?

Well, it was traumatic, but I took it as an adventure. We already knew more or less what could happen to us if we were caught, and what we were going to do. If by any chance we were caught by U.S. Immigration we already knew what we had to say so they wouldn't send us back to Nicaragua. We had to speak like Mexicans, we had to say we were from a city in Mexico.

Didn't you have to prove you were from Mexico?

Yes, we had to identify ourselves. So we got IDs stating that we were Mexicans. When we crossed the river it was just like we were taking a morning stroll to the beach. The coyotes knew all the ins and outs. We floated across the river in an innertube, with our clothes in a plastic bag. Once we got to the American side, we dressed and started walking through a field of oranges. There were paths everywhere. We crossed into the U.S. with no problem, nobody saw us, and we ended up at a golf course. Once we got there we acted like we belonged there and no one paid any attention. We continued walking until we came to a Holiday Inn. From there we took a cab -- the cabdriver also was involved, that's all one connection -- to downtown Brownsville. We waited there for a person who was going to pick us up and take us to San Benito. The other person was already waiting for us when we arrived. He took us to a house on the outskirts of San Benito, a house exclusively for that purpose. There we saw ten other people who had made the same trip.

The real problem isn't in crossing the river, it's in getting through the road checks in South Texas. On the road to Houston, you hit the first checkpoint soon after crossing the border and there is another one two or three hours later on down the road. The driver of each vehicle that passes has to identify himself. There are a few policeman at each road block.

Each road block has a small trailer or van, it's a temporary, mobile station. When they get a lot of illegals, they call headquarters and a bus comes and takes them away. The risk is greater passing through these gates than in crossing the river, because while crossing the river it's more difficult to be caught -- it's more secluded. The illegals try to avoid the road blocks, they try going over the mountains and they have to walk a great distance. There are a lot of risks in doing this. A lot of times they get caught because there is always a helicopter watching the area, day and night. There are a lot of paths to follow and immigration goes into some of the paths searching for people. But we were fortunate to pass right through the road block. Maybe the guy who took us

through knew someone there. When we passed through it was like we were tourists. The person who drove us got out of the car and greeted the man who was on duty. They didn't ask us anything and we just left.

How did you end up here in Washington, D.C. after arriving in the U.S.?

After leaving San Benito we went to Corpus Christi and the coyotes put us on a bus to Houston. When my mother-in-law knew that we were in Houston, she made reservations on Eastern Airlines; we got our tickets, went to the airport, got on the plane and came here.

Are your working here?

Yes, I started working as soon as I got here. My first job was with a construction company near Dulles Airport. They were building a high school and I worked there for four months. After that job finished, I started looking for another job, but I had problems because I didn't have papers or anything. I started working temporary jobs in hotels and in restaurants as a dishwasher. I had a job in a school, cleaning. Later, I started working with a Hispanic painting company painting houses and apartments. I worked about a year painting. About this time, I started going to a mental health agency of the D.C. government that serves the Hispanic community. I went because I was drinking too much. Someone told my wife I should go there, so I did. That treatment helped, and I even found the job I have now through some people I met there.

Are you working now?

Yes, I'm working in a hospital now, but not as a nurse. I can't work as a nurse because I don't have my nurse's license here. I wish I could get my license here, but there are a lot of obstacles that prevent me from getting it. First, I have to learn English. Then, I'd have to dedicate at least one year just to studying. Right now I'm working as a nurses' aid in a special program for Hispanics at the hospital.

What impression of the U.S. did you have before you came?

Well, we already had an idea. We recognized the U.S. from the news, from what other people say about it, but I had never come here before. From geography classes in school one recognizes parts of the U.S. and imagines what type of life one can have here. So when I came here I came with a lot of hope to be successful, to get ahead. I thought things would be easier for me, I thought I was going to have new things, I was going to learn English, and there were going to be many positive things in the experience for me and my family. But the truth is that on five or six occasions I wanted to go back. I had a lot of problems with work and alcohol. We lived in a one-room apartment and there were long periods when there wasn't any work. My wife too was sometimes without work. She worked as a babysitter for quite some time. Finally she got another job that turned out well. But it has been really rough on us. We have not been here quite three years yet, and only now are we

starting to do better. But for that first year and a half I wished I could return to Nicaragua. I was struggling from one end to the other, working for one or two weeks, then being unemployed again. Very difficult.

Do you plan to return someday to your country or would you like to stay in the U.S.?

Well, the plans I had were to return to Nicaragua. But the only way I would return is if the Sandinistas would leave. Now I would return only to visit my family. If the Sandinistas left I would return forever, because the American way is not our way. There are a lot of opportunities here to come out on top, but the truth is the opportunities are for the Americans because this country is theirs. We are intruders here. There are too many people here for us to come and take what is not ours.

Does the reality of the U.S. conform with your earlier impression?

I didn't know I was going to have so many difficulties. I knew that living here would be very hectic. You have to work in a different system than the one in Nicaragua. You have to live closed up in an apartment. We knew all that, but we didn't know how many problems we would have here as an illegal, without being able to seek help. The help for illegals is minimal. If we were here legally we could speak out and make others aware of our situation.

Would you like to become a U.S. citizen?

No, not a citizen, just a resident. Resident status permits you to visit your country, to stay in contact with your family. It lets you get a good job and get established here.

What do you miss most from your country?

My family. I always try to keep in touch with them. The only way I can stay in contact with them is by phone. Sometimes I write to them. It's tough.

Guatemala

The Guatemalan we talked with is a single male, twenty-nine years old, from the city of Quetzaltenango. He left Guatemala in September of 1979; his education there ended after the tenth grade.

Why did you leave?

I wanted to find a better place to live. Over there in Guatemala we couldn't find a way to study, and I have ambitions to study.

Why can't a person like you find a way to study?

Economic reasons: my family is poor and couldn't pay for my studies. I supported my mother and my brothers and sisters by selling clothes, shoes and bags, enough to survive, but I couldn't study at the same time. That's the reason I came over here. (Until recently, he had been studying in an educational program for immigrants in the Los Angeles area.)

Were you involved in any political movement in Guatemala?

No, but I was coordinator of a group of students at my high school that petitioned for more services, teachers, etc. I liked that work; we thought that by getting involved we'd help find a better solution for a lot of people.

The authorities didn't think it was right for you students to be involved in this type of activity?

(Laughter) No, they didn't like it because they thought we were communists. We had a lot of problems with the administrator of the school. We asked them for more teachers, more competent teachers. The ceiling used to leak when it rained and the services weren't good. We were demanding our rights to better facilities, better studies.

Were you involved in demonstrations on behalf of your struggle to get better services in your school?

Yes, there were many demonstrations.

So you raised your signs and presented your petitions to try to solve the problems?

Yes, we tried a lot of times. We never had any success. One of the government's responses was that the administrator had a lot of work; another was that it was too late to present the petitions. They accused us of going against the law.

You were not acting as a student should?

Yes, that's what they said. We'd get together with our colleagues to try to get something done, to get something resolved, to find a solution. I still hold a grudge against the school and the city because of the reprisals they took against

us students.

What form did the reprisals take?

One of my colleagues in the school movement was murdered. We could not do anything else after that -- they continued to accuse us of being communists, accusing us of working against the law. Some of my friends who were involved in all this left Guatemala and went to the U.S. or Honduras. We wanted a better life: in Guatemala we were threatened with death. Letters and notes were sent to some of my friends saying that you better stop or else. My colleagues were quiet people, they also had families. Among ourselves we decided that it wouldn't be to our benefit to continue our fight. We were few; we didn't have much power, we didn't have enough people to get what we wanted.

Was there any one event that compelled you to leave Guatemala?

I finally decided to leave when I found out about the murders of two of my friends from high school who had gone on to study at the university. One day they were dragged out of the university by force. The people who grabbed them were in civilian clothes. We didn't know if they were from the army or the government. After a week, one of them turned up in a field 33 kilometers from the city. The other one was found in another field on the outskirts of the city, tortured.

How were you able to leave Guatemala?

I was lucky because at the time I really didn't know about all the ways to get to the U.S. I talked to a friend and told him I wanted to get to the U.S. My friend said, if you want, I'll take you.

Did you come by car, by plane?

He brought me by car.

You crossed the Mexican border without problems?

Yes, but people from Central America always have trouble in Mexico because the federal police in Mexico try to take money from you.

Did they send you to a detention camp in Mexico?

No, never.

They let you pass?

They let us pass only after they took money from us.

How did you get into the United States?

I walked across the river from Ciudad Juarez to El Paso with some Mexicans. We paid them to get us across the border.

Where do you work here in the San Fernando Valley?

I work in a restaurant. Right now I do a lot of jobs in the restaurant, thank God, because when I first got here I was a dishwasher. Now I am a cook, in charge of part of the kitchen.

What kind of food do you cook?

Greek food. I know most of the Greek dishes now, because they took a long time to train me.

How long have you been working as a cook?

A year and a half in the kitchen, in this restaurant, almost 5 years.

What impression did you have of the United States before you came?

That's a very good question. When I was in Guatemala, my friends who had been here already would say, "Why don't you go to the U.S., there is a lot of money there." They said that anybody here could drive, could live. That there was a better world here, that here I could study, learn a lot of things.

And that's what you thought you'd find here?

Yes. Exactly. The impression that I had was that I would live in a house with a garden, that I could open the doors, see a lot of nice things, and that I could choose whatever I wanted to do.

Did you get this idea from movies, friends, books?

From people I knew who had lived here. Some from movies, a little from books that I saw. The Guatemalan men here would send their wives in Guatemala pictures of their cars, send them tapes. Someday I said to myself, I'm going to have those things too; but I never imagined that I would come here.

How did you think U.S. authorities would treat you?

Well, this is what I didn't have any notion of. The people who did live here and went back didn't say anything about their dealings with the authorities. They just would talk about how life was better here. They never said how immigration would treat us or how we would find jobs.

Now that you're here in the U.S., does the reality of life here confirm your earlier impressions?

Yes, because the dream that I had before, of seeing the garden, well, now here I see it.

Now you have a garden, a full refrigerator, closets full of clothes, a car to drive?

Well, not yet, but you have to work to be able to get that. Here you can work; with a lot of sacrifice you can get what you want because it is a civilized

country. Even though we say it's a civilized country there is still a lot of ignorance and discrimination. There are a lot of things we didn't realize, there is still a lot of discrimination and for that you have to make sacrifices, and that is what I see.

Why do you think you haven't got everything you wanted yet?

The most difficult problem we face is the language, not being able to communicate. If you don't speak English, you can't get the care you want, the range of friends you want, or even go to some restaurants because you can't order well in English. It's difficult to get a job . . .

Do you make enough money to buy eyeglasses, clothes, and the opportunity to go to good schools like other Americans? Do you have sufficient money to live well here in the U.S.?

To be able to live the way you want you have to have money . . . this country is a capitalist country. One of the things that we have, the Latinos, is that we have an opportunity to study here, we have that advantage. If we study we can do something for ourselves.

Why can't you study now?

Because of limited time; time is one's enemy.

Because you have to work a lot of hours, you don't have enough time?

Yes, because I have to work to be able to pay my expenses. Rent is $170: my share for living in a four-bedroom house with four other people.

Would it be difficult to find a better job?

Maybe, but I haven't tried. For right now, I'm satisfied to stay where I am, I haven't had any problems. About two weeks ago, I was offered two other jobs to run a restaurant, one was Iranian, the other Italian. They asked me how much I earned, and I was negotiating with them. Maybe it is time to move on, I've been here five years and have learned a great deal, but I know my job here well . . . My boss supports me in my work; that's why I haven't moved on. The boss is an immigrant too -- Greek -- but he's a legal resident. He understands my situation.

Do you plan someday to return to your country?

Very good question . . .

Can you ever forget your country?

No, I can never forget my country. No one can ever forget where he was born. Here it's very good, this country is very good, but it would be better if we immigrants could make money and go help others in Guatemala that need

help.

Have the conditions changed so that you could go back to Guatemala and get the things you wanted as a student?
No, I don't think things have changed, things seem the same.

Even with this new president (Cerezo)?
The changes are minimal, it seems.

If you can't return, do you plan to stay here?
Yes. Yes, I want to stay so I can try to solve a lot of problems . . .

Permanently?
Well, I don't think so.

Would you like to become a U.S. citizen?
No. Someday I want to return to Guatemala.

Do you fear sudden arrest and deportation?
Well, for me, yes. Because now the way the law is, yes, I'm a little bit afraid, because then I wouldn't be able to continue what I'm doing. It's like some plant that is cut and doesn't grow anymore. I'm a little afraid of deportation because if they deport me to Guatemala, then I'll have a record there and they'll be watching me.

What are your major problems here?
The first problem is to resolve the problem of being able to stay here for a while.

Legally?
Yes. To be able to look for a job with resident's papers, with the same rights as anyone else.

What do you miss about your country?
The customs, the culture, the natural things. Nature is more accessible there. The reality here is that you're a slave of your job. It's always home to work, work to home. If you have to do something you have to rush, everything is hectic. Over there it's not like that. Things go at a more natural pace. If there wasn't the political problem over there I'd go back to Guatemala to try to help my people, doing whatever I can.

IV. Epilogue: The Real Numbers on Undocumented Immigration

The popular assumption that has spurred the recent debate on immigration reform is the claim that undocumented (illegal) immigration to the United States has reached crisis proportions. Press accounts refer to "rising tides" or "floods" of illegal immigration that threaten to undermine American society and imperil the health of our institutions.

Speculative estimates on the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States, such as the four to twelve million claimed in 1976 by Commissioner Leonard Chapman of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, are generally tied to statistics collected by the INS on apprehensions of deportable aliens. The assumption is that arrests are only a fraction of successful furtive entries; hence, the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. must be many times higher than the number of those apprehended at the border. INS apprehensions along the U.S.-Mexico border exceeded one million by 1978 and the Border Patrol estimates that 1,700,000 apprehensions will occur along that border in fiscal year 1986.

However, a landmark 1983 study by demographers Jeffrey S. Passel of the Bureau of the Census and Robert Warren of the INS refutes the speculative estimates that have gained wide acceptance in the media, the public debate and the halls of Congress. Entitled "A Count of the Uncountable: Estimates of Undocumented Aliens Counted in the 1980 United States Census," the study, using rigorous scientific and statistical methods, calculated the number of aliens counted by the 1980 Census to be just over two million.

Warren and Passel begin their dismantling of previous estimates based on INS apprehension statistics with a definition of the terms "settlers," "sojourners," and "commuters." "Settlers" migrate with the intention of residing permanently in the United States. "Sojourners" usually enter for relatively brief periods, looking for temporary or seasonal work, while "commuters" live in Mexico (or Canada) and come to the U.S. to work, returning to their countries after a stay in the U.S. of a few hours of a few days. Warren and Passel's estimate of the undocumented population counted in the 1980 Census reflects only that part of the total undocumented population that "resides" in the United States: that is, settlers and long-term sojourners. Of course, short-term sojourners and commuters were in the United States throughout 1980 as well; thus, the total number of undocumented aliens present but not necessarily living in the U.S. at any one time in 1980 would have been greater than 2 million. The Census Bureau, however, is charged with determining the number of people residing in the United States at the time of the Census: their count excludes commuters and short-term sojourners.

The problem with using INS apprehension statistics as a basis for estimating the undocumented population in the United States is that:

1) Such estimates do not distinguish between settlers, sojourners, and commuters. Sojourners and commuters, intending to stay only a brief period in the U.S., may cross the border several times during the year. They may also be arrested several times per year, thus inflating any direct ratio between arrests and the undocumented population in the United States.

2) Such estimates do not take into account the number of undocumented aliens who return to their own country after a period of residence in the United States. Warren and Passel suggest that relatively few undocumented aliens remain in the U.S. more than ten years, and almost none stay more than twenty years (see page 16). This substantial return flow of migrants is not factored into the speculative estimates.

3) Any rise in border arrests may reflect more effective surveillance and apprehension tactics by the INS than were used in the past, as well as increases in personnel or improvements in personnel deployment.

In a 1985 paper entitled "Undocumented Immigrants: How Many?", Passel emphasized the error of relying on apprehension statistics in making estimates of the undocumented population. The Chula Vista sector of California accounts for 40% of the U.S.-Mexico border apprehensions. Seven out of eight Mexicans apprehended there during the period 1982-1984 were male. This contrasts sharply with Warren and Passel's earlier study, where they found that, of the undocumented Mexican "settlers" in the United States, 55% was male. These apprehension statistics, writes Passel, are "hardly the composition one would expect in a migrant stream of settlers. In fact, the compositon is strongly indicative of sojourners and commuters."

The major question regarding the Warren and Passel estimate of the resident undocumented population in the United States, of course, concerns the proportion of this population that was not included in the Census count.

Follow-up studies compared the 1980 U.S. Census figures with the results of a 1981 survey of Mexican-born residents from the Los Angeles metropolitan area and with figures compiled by the 1980 Mexican Census. The conclusion reached from these two comparisons was that the 1980 U.S. Census included one-half to two-thirds of the undocumented immigrant population. The Census Bureau's Passel agreed with this conclusion in a September 11, 1985, appearance before the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law. He told the subcommittee that research by the Census Bureau and other analysts pointed "very strongly" to an undocumented population of two to four million in 1980. Passel concluded his statement by saying that the undocumented populaton is growing at a rate far

less than the 500,000 per year figure that is commonly cited in press reports. Census Bureau estimates put the annual increase in a range of 100,000 to 300,000.

Will these estimates of the undocumented immigrant population -- reached after detailed and precise analysis by statisticians and demographers at the Census Bureau -- reorient or transform the continuing debate in Congress over immigration reform? Not very likely. In a May 2, 1986, "Dear Colleague" letter urging his fellow House members to reject a section of the proposed immigration reform bill that would legalize the status of part of the undocumented population, Rep. Hal Daub of Nebraska made reference to "an estimated four to twelve million aliens now in the country."

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The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

When the United States annexed a third of Mexico's territory following the Mexican War, nearly 77,000 Mexicans became U.S. citizens. These new citizens were systematically discriminated against, denied voting rights, excluded from decent jobs or a good education and subjected to unprovoked physical violence. The sign, "No Mexicans Allowed" was to be found everywhere.

Hispanic Americans responded by building a strong tradition of self-determination. Service organizations were started to champion Hispanic rights and in 1929, a number of these groups met in Corpus Christi, Texas, and merged into a single self-help organization, the League of United Latin American Citizens. LULAC councils soon spread throughout Texas, into New Mexico and California, then to the Midwest, Florida, Washington, D.C., New York, Massachusetts, and Puerto Rico. LULAC's membership now includes not only Mexican Americans, but Hispanics from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and many other Latin American countries.

As LULAC grew, so did our achievements. LULAC-sponsored lawsuits resulted in landmark court decisions abolishing Hispanic school segregation and guaranteeing Hispanics the right to sit on juries. LULAC's "Little School of the 400" became the model for the enormously successful Headstart program. We have trained and found jobs for thousands of Hispanics, built housing for thousands more, provided over $2 million in scholarship aid to Hispanic students, launched programs for youth, women and the elderly, and reached out in cooperative alliance with corporate America.

No other organization can match our half-century record of service to Hispanic Americans, but too much remains to be done to rest on our history. LULAC will continue to work with our fellow Hispanic citizens until the only place to find poverty, ignorance and discrimination is in the history books.

The Latin American Project

The leadership of LULAC has long felt that Hispanic Americans can play a special and decisive role in our country's diplomatic efforts in the Western Hemisphere. The Latin American Project has been devised with the following goal: to foster greater knowledge of events in Latin America among the Hispanic population in the United States. The Project presents the ideas and opinions of prominent Latin Americans to the LULAC membership, Members of Congress, and other interested Americans through the distribution of these booklets and the convening of biannual seminars.

The Latin American Project has been made possible through a two-year grant from The Rockefeller Foundation.